

## A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO A PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

### Welcome!

This handout has been prepared to help you as a citizen-participant in the process. The following information is intended to familiarize you with various topics so that you may understand what will happen at the meeting and how you can be more effective if you choose to speak.

**What is the Planning Commission?** The Planning Commission is a body made up of citizens appointed by the Mayor and approved by the Urban County Council from a wide background of community interest. The members serve four-year terms on a staggered basis. Members receive NO COMPENSATION of any type for their time in service to the community. Members will typically give four to five days a month to Commission-related matters – literally, hundreds of cases each year.

From the audience's perspective, Commission members sit on the **left** side of the table.

**What is "the staff?"** Primarily, the term refers to individuals employed by the Urban County Government in the Division of Planning. One of the roles of the Division is to make recommendations on pending cases up for consideration by the Commission. The staff may also refer to employees of the Divisions of Engineering, Building Inspection, Traffic Engineering, Department of Law and others who are often present at the meeting to advise the Commission.

From the audience's perspective, staff members sit on the right side of the table, and in the special recording/transcribing area on the left side of the room.

**Are these rezoning cases and subdivision developments proposed BY the Commission?** **NO**, except in certain rare cases such as a neighborhood-wide downzoning, or historic district designation. The cases are submitted for Commission action by private landowners and/or developers who wish to do something to their property.

**When will the case I'm interested in be addressed at the hearing?** It is impossible to say for many reasons. No one knows at the outset of the meeting how many citizens will appear and wish to speak on any given case. Generally, cases are heard in the order they appear on the **agenda**, which is available at the meeting. However, certain cases involving requests for postponement, or which may be approved with little or no controversy or discussion are usually moved to the front of the docket and disposed of quickly. This allows more time for the cases needing special attention and discussion. The process is called "sounding the agenda."

**Will I be able to speak if I wish to? YES.** The Commission truly desires to hear from any citizen who wishes to participate. The general order of presentation for different types of cases is noted on the agenda, and the Chairman of the Commission will make it clear when it is time to speak. The Commission only asks that speakers and audience:

- 1) maintain civility and common courtesy at all times;
- 2) speak on issues relevant to the decision to be made;
- 3) avoid repeating of testimony already presented by others.

Following these guidelines make the hearing better for all participants.

**If I still have questions, what should I do?** Please feel free to approach staff members for help and to get answers your questions.

The Commission and staff understand that the hearing environment is unfamiliar and uncomfortable to many citizens, and that the decisions to be made often involve strong emotions on the part of participants. Most difficult decisions result in one side or the other, of any given issue, not receiving a favorable action by the Planning Commission. However, decisions must be in accordance with the laws set out by the state and local governments, as well as the court system. Whether you are an applicant, supporter, or objector, the Commission respects and appreciates your position in the matter at hand and must consider the full range of issues in their decision-making process.

The Planning Commission and staff wish that your experience will be as satisfactory as possible under the circumstances, and thank you for your interest in community planning issues.